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C O N F I D E N T I A L BASRAH 000139

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SUBJECT: BASRAH SUNNI IMAM ATTENDS CONFERENCE IN TEHRAN

REF: (A) BASRAH 78 (B) BASRAH 101 (C) BASRAH 109

CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Regional Coordinator, REO Basrah,
Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) The Regional Coordinator (RC) met with Sheik Khalid al-Mullah, a close REO contact and prominent Basrah Sunni imam, at the latter's request on August 24. Sheik Khalid recently returned from four days in Tehran attending the 19th International Islamic Unity Conference that focused on the role of Muslims living in non-Islamic countries. He said the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sponsored his trip. He requested the meeting with the RC in order to share his experience and thoughts on his trip. Sheik Khalid described the attendees as a mix of Sunni and Shia from all over the world, including participants from Kuwait, Syria, Australia, Holland and Sweden among others. He said that there were only three participants from Iraq, although he understood that approximately ten people had been invited. Besides Sheik Khalid, the other two Iraqi participants were from Baghdad and Najaf.

¶2. (C) Sheik Khalid said he presented research he had done regarding the view of Muslims by people living in non-Islamic countries as well as his ideas on Iran's pursuit of nuclear energy. In brief, he said there were "no problems" between westerners and Muslims, and insurgents sent to cause violence in the western world gave the rest of the world an inaccurate picture of Muslims. He also told the participants of the conference that Iran's pursuit of nuclear energy was wrong-headed and that nuclear weapons could come into the hands of insurgents. He said that throughout the conference, Iranian participants reiterated that nuclear energy was being sought by Iran for non-weapons purposes. Sheik Khalid told the RC that he was not well educated on the topic of nuclear energy, but believed that other alternatives must exist that would be better options for Iran.

¶3. (C) According to Sheik Khalid, the Iranians were "very upset" with the Americans, but he tried to explain his views on the United States. In discussions with fellow participants, he clarified that the United States stood for "the right ideas" and that without the United States Sadaam Hussein would never have been punished and Iraq would not have been freed. In the end, Sheik Khalid told the RC that other participants accepted that the Iraqis would have a different view of the United States. At the end of the conference, Ayatollah Ali Khameni spoke to the participants. In his talk, Khameni endorsed the Lebanese resistance, described the U.S. as a devil and a tyrant, explained that all nuclear research was being done for scientific purposes and denied that Iran had any involvement in the violence in Iraq. Sheik Khalid said that he was successful in convincing other participants to not include the legalization of resistance in Iraq in the final conference statement.

14. (C) Comment: Sheik Khalid is a very moderate Sunni cleric in Basrah and a frequent REO contact (see reftels). His family currently resides in Syria due to threats against Sunnis in Basrah (his son was kidnapped and held hostage, ref B) and he divides his time between Basrah and Syria. He is scheduled to go on an international visitor program, "Promoting Interfaith Dialogue" in mid-November. Always open and honest about his views on the political and security situations in Basrah, he is a worthwhile contact and is one of the few people working to improve Basrah for the good of the community and not for personal gain. His views are very much pro-coalition and anti-extremists. While in the United States on his visit, he would make a convincing and excellent representative of the Sunni community in any high-level meeting or press event. End comment.

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